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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 006353

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/04/2015

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SUBJECT: PERES MAY NEED SECOND ROUND VOTE TO TAKE LABOR
CHAIR

Classified By: Political Counselor Norman Olsen for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

1. (C) Summary: A November 3 poll and Labor Party sources indicate that Shimon Peres' anticipated first-round victory over contender Amir Peretz in the November 9 Labor Party primaries could be in jeopardy absent a high voter turnout and the withdrawal of the two other contenders. Rattled by Peretz's dramatic jump in the polls this fall, Peres appealed November 3 to Matan Vilna'i and Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, with 15 percent and 11 percent of party support, respectively, to withdraw from the race and place their support behind him. Polls still show Peres winning a significant victory in any second round. End Summary.

2. (C) A November 3 Dahuf Institute poll shows that in the event of a 60 percent voter turnout in the Labor Party primaries, Histadrut Chair Peretz would receive 34 percent of the vote and interim party Chair Peres 37 percent. Until recently, polls have shown Peres winning at least the 41 percent necessary for a first-round win. With a 70 percent turnout, however, support for Peres jumps to 41 percent and for Peretz drops to 30 percent. Observers attribute the better low-turnout numbers for Peretz to his better organizational skills. An upbeat Peretz told Poloff October 31 that he attributes his rise in popularity to his tireless campaigning. He questioned the accuracy of earlier polls, commenting that he "cannot see how Peres could get 20 percent more" in the earlier polls when Peretz has been working "morning to evening" and "going around the country" campaigning. Peretz said that when out campaigning he feels sure of people's support for him and did not get the sense that many people support Peres. Former Labor Party Chair Amram Mitzna told poloff November 3 that Peretz has an advantage in motivating his supporters to the polls since he has a "very good organization -- the best for the day of elections." Labor Party organizer for the northern region Nimrod Vizansky told Poloff November 3 that Peretz can rely on Histadrut members to come out to support him, and he accused Peretz of using his position to pressure Histadrut members to vote for him. Inclement weather could keep those Labor voters who would vote for Peres from the polls, according to Vilansky.

3. (C) The November 3 poll also shows Peres winning with 54 percent to 41 percent for Peretz in a runoff vote, which would be required if no candidate obtains 41 percent of the vote on November 9. The assumption is that those who voted for Ben-Eliezer and Vilna'i in the first round would shift their support to Peres in the second round. Peres reportedly wants to win in the first round, and he appealed to Ben-Eliezer and Vilna'i November 3 to drop out of the race and place their support behind him. Ehud Barak, who recently withdrew from the race and threw his support to Peres, met with Ben-Eliezer and Vilna'i November 3 to urge them to follow his example. Thus far, the two have refused to bow out.

4. (C) Despite immediate post-poll reports of a possible move to postpone the primaries, Peretz campaign manager MK Yuli Tamir told Poloff November 4 that the Labor Party internal court decided against moving to do so. Vilansky speculated that Peres supporters, fearing a Peretz victory, were behind this attempt to delay the vote, but Mitzna and Tamir dismissed this view.

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JONES